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VALUES AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:  
A VITAL TOOL FOR NATION BUILDING

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**Abstract**

*The issue of Value and Religious Education is one that has been discussed by many authors and scholars with various perspectives on the subject matter, yet, very few have been discussed in relation to nation building, especially in Nigeria. This article expands on religion as a major influence on value education and its role in national building. An assessment of Nigeria's achievement since her independence shows clearly that the nationhood had been a catalogue of crises, indiscipline, human misery and wanton disregard of the value of human life. This study explored available existing literature so as to come up with a better understanding of Value and Religious Education in Nigeria. The study included recent published works in order to capture the recent understanding and trends in the field of Value and Religious Education. This paper concluded that all efforts to tackle the problem of national development in Nigeria have proved abortive. This paper, therefore recommends serious conscientization and socialization along the line of value reorientation through the use of religion and religious education, as religion*

*represent one big variable that can either positively or negatively influence the political, social, economic and psychological well-beings of the entire citizens of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Values, Religious Education, Nation building, Socio-economic, Value reorientation*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria was a 'product' of a British colony and became an independent nation on the first day of October 1960. Her population is estimated to be about 200 million or more. The modern state of Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and natural resources. Yet, the modern state of Nigeria remains a society in which the followership and of course, the leaders, seem to have lost their God-given morality of what is good and bad (Agunwa, 2017; Ezeilo, 2017), and has therefore failed to develop the right value both morally and ethically (Mordi, 2015). This is evident from the ways we organize ourselves in terms of day activities including human relationships, politics, economy and religious lives (Azuakor, 2019).

Nigerian society has for a long time been bedeviled with corruption, indiscipline, dishonesty, injustice, abuse of drugs, insecurity of live and property, denial of fundamental human rights, ritual murder, kidnapping and human trafficking (Ezeilo, 2017; Cook, 2018). Hence, value debate has a long history in the country, and it seems to arise whenever educationists and decision-makers struggle with dilemmas associated with human rights violations, moral decadence in society, and lack of discipline in schools (Nieuwenhuis, Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2007; Van der Walt, 2010; Van der Merwe, 2011).

The idea of education involving values and character has elicited a great deal of interest in recent years and countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America (USA), New Zealand, the Netherlands and Australia have held conferences on values education in the shape of character-building programmes with well-defined policies (Arthur, 2011). Yet, developing countries like Nigeria have continually ignored the large importance of value education in the development of her citizens.

From the very outset of Nigeria's independence, there have always been idle hopes for national development and unity. Nigeria found herself in a situation where one crisis bred another, holding the record for one of the bloodiest civil wars in African history. An assessment of Nigeria's achievement since her independence shows clearly that the nation had been steadily on a downward trend in all aspects of national life. It therefore means that, instead of celebrating peace and progress, Nigerian sixty years of nationhood had been a catalogue of crises, indiscipline, human misery and wanton is regard of the values of human life (Iwenofu, 2010).

All efforts towards national development and unity will continue to be vague unless serious attention and sense of commitment prevail in applying or building values in her citizens through education alongside religion, while it is harnessed towards nation building and unity in Nigeria. Religious activities in Nigeria present a big opportunity to influence the characters of Nigerian citizens, as the country is one of the economies that is experiencing the fastest growth of religious activities in the world (Okwuchukwu, 2019). The studies of Vishalache (2015), Agunwa (2017), Adediwura and Tayo (2017) and Adebowale and Oluwole (2019), have examined the relationship between value and education in general. However, there is paucity of research on the negative effect of values and religious education on nation building in developing country like Nigeria. Azuakor (2019) suggested that further studies on the interaction between value and religious education should be considered to enhance societal standard and generalizability of empirical findings. It is in line of this that this study intends to evaluate the effect of values and religious education on nation building. The issue of value and religious education is one that has been discussed by many authors and scholars with various perspectives on the subject matter, yet, very few have been discussed in relation to nation building, especially in Nigeria. This paper is aimed at expanding on religion as a major influence on value education and its role in national building.

### **Objectives of the Paper**

The primary aim of this paper is to investigate values and religious education in Nigeria with reference to nation building. Other specific objectives include:

- i. to investigate the effect of values and religious education on nation building, and
- ii. to identify religion as a major influence on value education and its role in national building.

### **Conceptual Meaning of Value Education**

Iyamah and Reuben Daniel (2014) defines values as the goal we work for and elements that show the way we go about what we do. Osaat (2011) perceives values as the guiding principles for acceptable behaviour which must conform with the value system of the society and the people therein. The values and attitudes we live by, affect how we relate with other people and they cannot be separated from cognitive and understanding of humans. Values are used as standard gauge to determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong. Rokeach (1973) asserts that, value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. It implies that, values engage moral considerations that approved of by individual or by societal standard of a society. The chosen values an individual affirms to become internalized and becomes an acceptable life pattern which is cherished and highly priced in the society. These values are imbibed and transmitted to generations to build the shared cultural values of the society (Odivwri, 2016).

Value education includes all kinds of activities in the schools in which students learn or develop values and morality which are pertinent for the society (Taylor, 2006). Value is the major determinant of accepted behaviour and guiding principle for interaction in all human societies. It is the extent to which a behaviour conforms to the value system of the people that determines the acceptability of such behavior (Eluu, 2016). Values are essential building blocks on which an education for a humanistic and international society is built. This boosts self-esteem both

personal and cultural, promotes respect and tolerance for others as individuals and as members of ethnic/cultural groups, and creates a sense of belonging. Also, Value-based education promotes a secure physical, emotional and political locus within society; a sense of responsibility in relation to social, political, economic, cultural and environmental factors, an appreciation of the importance of learning (Sanyal, 2000).

### **Religious education and Value Development in Nigeria**

The two major religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam. African Traditional Religion is another force to be reckoned with, as there seems to be an upsurge in adherence to this religion among many Nigerians today, especially the youth. For Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015), during the spread of Christianity in Nigeria in the said 19th century the resolution of the British colonial government was that the only way to redeem and regenerate the Africans was to teach them to be industrious while giving them the gospel of Christ. This has developmental import. The Islamic religion and education is said to have reached Northern Nigeria as early as the 8th century and also to have reached Southern Nigeria, especially Yoruba land, long before the Islamic Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804. African Traditional Religion (ATR), for its part, was the original religion of the people of Africa (and in our paper, Nigeria) before the Africans got contact with the Western world. It is still extant and had/has its developmental contributions.

It is obvious Nigerians are notoriously religious because religion is seen to permeate every aspect of their daily lives. It is in this vein, that Mbiti (1969) observed that wherever an African or a Nigerian is, there is his religion; he carries it to the fields where he sows seeds or is harvesting a new crop, he takes it with him to a beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony and if he is educated he takes religion with him to examination hall at school or the university, if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of representatives, or public offices. With the above caption, one will understand the depth of attachment a Nigerian has for his religion. Yet respect for morality and religious values in public and private lives of Nigerians have reached regrettable low condition. Current events in Nigeria such as

kidnapping, ritual killings and abortions amongst others make one wonder whether it can be said that increase in religious activities necessarily implies ascending over immoral attitudes among the populace (Ezeilo, 2017).

Agunwa (2017), opine that through religion, we can inculcate in individual virtual virtues like obedience, humility, meekness, love for one's neighbor, forgiveness of injuries. Onah (2017) said man learns through his religion that certain actions are good or bad and this directs him towards living a virtuous life. This is needed for good relationship among individuals and for national development. We need not doubt therefore that religion legitimates social institutions and controls people's behaviours by bestowing upon them an ultimately ontological status; Ibenwa (2014) argues that location of this status can only be found within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference (Dena, 2012). This opportunity should be used as an important avenue for religious authorities to help their teeming followers into engaging in somewhat meaningful projects that can contribute to and positively affect societal development.

There is no society in the world, the Nigerian society inclusive, where children are taught how to love, be peaceful, accommodating, honest, altruistic, tolerant, and very importantly, just and eager to serve and that society will not leap into quantum development (Azuakor, 2019). On following Jesus the leader, the Ugandan NCDC (2009) teaches, that "the learner is expected to develop understanding of the qualities Jesus had and how He served different people without discrimination. The learner further has to apply them in his/her life style" (p. 7). Discrimination along ethnic and religious lines is a major bane of development and cohesion in Nigeria. The activities of the Muslim Fulani and government's treatment of same, show dichotomy and discrimination being copiously showcased by the current Buhari administration and it becomes all the more worrisome when juxtaposed with the treatment meted out to such other groups as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

### **Value Education and Nation Building**

Values are determinant of one's choice towards any event, object or phenomenon which an individual can act upon freely after a

thoughtful consideration of other alternatives. Values Education curriculum therefore establishes an environment for respect, trust, care and acceptance which is vital to human society (Odivwri, 2016). Value education is such a concept which refines human behaviour which gives truth, love, beauty, self-control and respect to all and dignity of labour. There is no doubt that the process of nation building would give rise to positive consequences in religious, political, social, economic, educational and psychological aspects of life in the country, thereby resulting in national development. Today, education has become a process for acquiring a degree for professional purposes. Sometimes it loses path for making human resource.

Today value education is specially needed for the youth. Youth can play a pivotal role in nation building. It is said that youth is the backbone of nation. The spirit of youth may continue till to last breath of life. Irrespective of age the person who possesses innovative thinking for any developmental process, missionary spirit, mental strength to do anything at any cost may be termed as youth (Goswami, 2014).

National development and, or nation building has been described to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Adebowale & Oluwole, 2019). It includes such diverse aspects as peace, ecological integrity and human rights. It requires us to reassess our concept of “progress”. We may conclude that values are very much significant for rebuilding the nation and everyone should be conscious for the realization of true values not only for the societal development and nation building but also for their own personal development for a balanced personality.

Values education is the responsibility of us all and not just of schools. The family, universities, businesses and sport, for example, are all ideal contexts to teach those ethical principles. Even so, for a number of years now, countries like Australia and the UK have actually been contemplating including values education as part of compulsory education.

For instance, for an individual to live a meaningful life and contribute positively to the development of his society, he needs religion and moral education to achieve this dream. Through the

teaching and inculcation of value education, the individual is made to realize the importance of others, respect their views and ideas, understand government programmes, see the need to pay tax regularly for the provision of social amenities, maintain the government properties as well as obey the laws as an obedient member of the society (Vishalache, 2015).

### **The Potentials of Education to Impact Value Reorientation and National Development**

In affirmation of the importance of education, the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations and now the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). Particularly SDG 4, identify quality education as critical for national development in all its ramifications. Education provides recipients skills for economic resources to enable them conquer poverty; as well as social skills for forging efficient relationships with other members of the society. Before the advent of Western education, Nigeria had a very vibrant system of traditional education in which the virtues of industry, integrity, honesty, transparency, contentment etc. were held in very high esteem. Such virtues were considered so important aspects of the Nigerian culture that they were entrenched in the traditional religious liturgy, dance and drama, folklore, art and craft. Indeed, the concept of *omoluwabi* a person of good character in all ramifications, was the pivot around which all attempts at educating the Nigerian child revolved (Fabamwo, 2012).

With the advent of Western education in Nigeria, the development of sound values and moral character remained a cardinal national objective of education. It is in order to graphically impress sound values in the minds of Nigerian students, that most institutions adopt complementary slogans as their institutional mottos such as *Probitas Doctrina* (In Character and Learning) *Scientia Probitas* (Knowledge and Character), *In truth and indeed, No Sweat, No Sweet* etc.

The import of positive value orientation for any nation's development cannot be over emphasised. For instance, one internationally accepted indicator of value orientation is corruption, because of its profound implication for education standard,



terrorism and development. One plausible reason for the apparently low ability of education to impact value re-orientation and national development in Nigeria is the inability of higher education to produce adequate manpower with required knowledge, skills and values for effective nation building. The possible contributions of such factors as inadequate funding, examination malpractice, skewed staff-student ratio and brain drain to the observed wide disconnect between graduates' knowledge and skills are well articulated and documented (Esenwa, 2010; Olasehinde-Williams, 2012).

Consequently, to positively impact attitude and bring about value re-orientation, education must promote the fundamental values of integrity. All obligations and responsibilities in the education enterprise must be discharged with transparency, honesty, trust, fairness and respect. This is because unlike reflexes and instincts, high level human behaviours such as involved in value reorientation typically derive from cognitive (perception) and affective (feelings) situational analysis as stressed in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986 & Mischel, 1968).

### **Conclusion**

Value and Religious Education in Nigeria have come to stay for good. However, the current expectation on value and Religious Education, in term of character modification and building of responsible society is quite discouraging. Sanity is strongly needed in the Nigeria society to salvage the nation and bring about sustainable development. It is indeed a clarion call to the citizens and government of Nigeria to focus on value education and has well use the tool of religion concentration of her citizens to reorientate and build appropriate moral character.

It is obvious that this paper brings into focus various challenges facing value and Religious Education and as well as some possible solutions. If these solutions are put into consideration, moral character, right value and proper norms will eventually become the foundation of the new Nigeria that will be second to none in the whole world. The interconnectivity of religion and value education have a high degree of interaction, hence, virtually affects each other.

### **The Way Forward**

The importance of values and religious education is very critical for the success of building a nation. In other words, the role of values and religious education in nation building cannot be overemphasized. Thus, for values and religious education to thrive as tools of nation building this paper suggests the following as the way forward:

Every religious education in Nigeria should recognize the rich and diverse religious heritage of the country and should adopt a co-operative model that accepts the rich heritage and the possibility of creative interaction between schools and faith, protecting the youth from religious discrimination or coercion. Learning about religion in these schools should be different from the religious instruction and religious nurture provided by the home, family, and religious community. Religious institutions should explore ways of avoiding or curbing religious fanaticism or extremism. They should aim at creating an integrated and informed community that affirms unity in diversity.

Values stands as light house giving direction to all who want to reach the right place in terms of human and national development and thus should be upheld. Values should be the guiding principles of the life, which facilitates the all-round development of a person. In addition, values education should be incorporated in the national policy while inculcation of desirable values in the followers is essential for meeting the crises of character, and the government needs to strengthen religious education which had helped to stabilize the society in the past.

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